

## CHAPTER 2

### Prophets

¶1 From the previous Chapter it follows, as we have already indicated,<sup>1</sup> that Prophets were not endowed with a more perfect mind, but with a more vivid power of imagining, as Scripture's narratives also teach abundantly.

2 For of Solomon it is established that he excelled others in wisdom, but not in the Prophetic gift.

3 Those very prudent men Heman, Darda and Kalchol<sup>2</sup> were not Prophets either; and on the other hand, human beings who were rustic and without any learning, were. Indeed, young women too, like Abraham's handmaid Hagar, were endowed with the Prophetic gift.<sup>3</sup>

4 This also agrees with experience and reason. For those who are very powerful in imagination are less capable of purely understanding things; and on the other hand, those who are more powerful in understanding, and cultivate it most, have a power of imagining which is more tempered and more under control, and they hold it by the rein, as it were, so as not to confuse it with understanding.

5 [2] Those who are eager to investigate wisdom and the knowledge of natural and spiritual matters from the books of the Prophets, therefore, err all along.<sup>4</sup> This I have decided to show here extensively, since the time, Philosophy, and, finally, the matter itself demand it: I care little about the growlings of a superstition that begrudges no one more than those who {30} cultivate true science and true life.

6 And alas! the matter has by now gone so far that those who openly confess that they have no idea of God and do not know God except through created things (of whose causes they are ignorant) are not ashamed to accuse Philosophers of Atheism.

¶2 [3] That I might deduce the matter in order, however, I will show that Prophets varied not only by reason of each Prophet's imagination and body temperament, but also by reason of the opinions with which each had been imbued; and so Prophecy never rendered Prophets more learned, as I will explain more extensively right away. But first to be dealt with here is the Prophets' certainty, not only since it has to do with the argument of this Chapter, but also since to some extent it serves what we aim to demonstrate.

<sup>1</sup> See 1.22.1-23.1.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Ki. 4:21.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 16:7-13.

<sup>4</sup> Lit.: the whole way.

### 2.3.1-4.1

¶3 [4] Since simple imagination does not of its own nature involve certainty, as every clear and distinct idea does, but something necessarily has to go along with the imagination for us to be able to be certain about the things that we imagine, namely, reasoning, hence it follows that by itself Prophecy cannot involve certainty—since, as we have already shown,<sup>5</sup> it depended on the imagination alone. And therefore the Prophets were certain of the revelation not through the revelation itself, but through some sign, as is obvious from Abraham (see Gen. 15:8), who, on hearing God's promise, asked for a sign. He did indeed believe in God, and did not seek a sign to have faith in God, but to know that it was being promised to him by God.

2 [5] The same thing is also established more clearly from Gideon. For thus he says to God: **וְעַשֵּׂית לִי אֶת שְׁאָתָה מִדְבָּר עַמִּי** *And make me a sign* (that I might know) *that you are speaking with me.*

3 See Judges 6:17.

4 God also says to Moses **וַזה לְךָ הָאוֹת כִּי אֲנִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךְ** *And this (is) the sign for you that I have sent you.*<sup>6</sup>

5 Hezekiah, who had long recognized that Isaiah was a Prophet, asked for a sign of the Prophecy predicting his health.<sup>7</sup>

6 This shows that the Prophets always had some sign by which they became certain about the matters they were imagining prophetically; and therefore Moses admonishes them to seek a sign from a Prophet, namely, the outcome of some future thing (see Dt. 18, last verse).<sup>8</sup>

7 [6] Prophecy therefore yields in this matter to natural knowledge, which needs no sign, but involves certainty of<sup>9</sup> its own nature.

8 For this Prophetic certainty was not mathematical, but only moral. This {31} is also established from Scripture itself. For in Deuteronomy 13,<sup>10</sup> Moses admonishes that if some Prophet wanted to teach new Gods, although he confirmed his teaching by signs and miracles, he would still be condemned to death. For, as Moses himself goes on to say, God also makes signs and miracles to tempt the populace. [7] And Christ also admonished his Disciples of this, as is established from Matthew 24:24.

9 Indeed, Ezekiel 14:9 clearly teaches that God sometimes deceives human beings by false revelations. For he says, **וְהַנּוּבִיא כִּי יִפּוֹתֵה וְדִבֶּר דָבָר אֲנִי יְהוָה סְתִיָּתִי אֶת הַנּוּבִיא הַזֶּה** *And when a (false) Prophet is induced and has spoken a word, I, God, have induced that Prophet—which Micaiah also attests to Ahab about the Prophets (see I Ki. 22:23).*

¶4 [8] And although this would seem to show that Prophecy and revelation are plainly a doubtful thing, they still had much certainty, as we have said.<sup>11</sup> For God never deceived the pious and the chosen; but, in line with that old proverb (see I Sam.

<sup>5</sup> See 1.6.1-13.1, 22.1-2.

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 3:12.

<sup>7</sup> II Ki. 20:8; cf. Is. 38:1-22.

<sup>8</sup> Dt. 18:22.

<sup>9</sup> Lit.: on the basis of. See Glossary, s.v. "on the basis of."

<sup>10</sup> Dt. 13:2-6.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 1.2.2, 24.6, 2.2.1-3.7.

24:14)<sup>12</sup> and as is established from the history<sup>13</sup> of Abigail and her speech,<sup>14</sup> God uses the pious as the instruments of his piety, and the impious as the executors and means of his anger. [9] This is also established very clearly from the incident of Micaiah which we have just cited.<sup>15</sup> For although God had decreed deceiving Ahab through Prophets, he still used only false Prophets, and revealed the matter as it was to a pious one and did not prohibit him from predicting true things.

2 Still, as I have said,<sup>16</sup> the Prophet's certainty was only moral, since no one can justify himself before God or boast that he is the instrument of God's piety, as Scripture itself teaches<sup>17</sup> and indicates by the matter itself. For God's anger seduced David into enumerating the populace,<sup>18</sup> and still Scripture attests abundantly to his piety. [10] Therefore, the whole Prophetic certainty was based on these three things.

3 First, the revealed matters were imagined very vividly, as we are used to being affected by objects while awake.

4 Second, the Sign.

5 Third, finally and especially, they had a spirit inclined solely to the equitable and the good.

6 And although Scripture does not always make mention of a Sign, still it is to be believed that the Prophets always had a Sign. For Scripture is not always used to narrating every condition and detail (as many have already noted), but rather to supposing matters as being recognized.

7 [11] Besides, {32} we can grant that Prophets who did not prophesy anything new unless it was contained in the Law of Moses did not need a sign, since they were confirmed by the Law.

8 For example, Jeremiah's Prophecy about the sacking of Jerusalem<sup>19</sup> was confirmed by the Prophecies of other prophets and by the threats of the Law,<sup>20</sup> and therefore he did not need a sign; but Hananiah, who contrary to all the Prophets was prophesying the quick restoration of the city, necessarily needed a sign; otherwise he would have had to doubt his Prophecy until the outcome of the matter being predicted by him confirmed his Prophecy.

9 See Jeremiah 28:9.

¶5 [12] Since, therefore, the certainty that arose in Prophets from signs was not mathematical (that is, one that follows from the necessity of the perception of the matter being perceived or seen) but only moral, and signs were not given unless to persuade the Prophet, hence it follows that Signs were given with respect to the opinions and capacity of the Prophet. Thus a sign that would render one Prophet

<sup>12</sup> I Sam. 24:14 reads: *As the ancient proverb says, "From the wicked comes forth wickedness, but my hand will not be on you."*

<sup>13</sup> Or: story.

<sup>14</sup> I Sam. 25:2-42 (especially 27-30, 38).

<sup>15</sup> See 2.3.9.

<sup>16</sup> See 2.3.8.

<sup>17</sup> E.g., Ps. 143:2, Rom. 3:20.

<sup>18</sup> II Sam. 24:1-17, I Chr. 21:1-30.

<sup>19</sup> Jer. 19-20.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. 2.3.8

## 2.5.2-6.2

certain of his Prophecy could hardly convince another who was imbued with other opinions. And therefore the signs varied with each Prophet.

2 [13] Thus too, as we have already said,<sup>21</sup> the revelation itself varied with each Prophet with respect to the disposition of the temperament of the body, with respect to that of the imagination, and with respect to the pattern of the opinions he had embraced beforehand.

3 For it varied with respect to the disposition<sup>22</sup> of the temperament in this mode: namely, if the Prophet was cheerful, to him were revealed victories, peace, and whatever moves human beings to joy besides. For these sorts of men are used to imagining such things more often. If, on the other hand, he was sad, to him were revealed wars, comeuppances, and every evil. And thus, as a Prophet was compassionate, flattering, angry, harsh, etc., to that extent he was more capable of *these* rather than *those* revelations.

4 [14] It thus varied with respect to the disposition of the imagination as well, however: namely, if the Prophet was elegant, he perceived God's mind in an elegant style too; and if he was confused, he did so confusedly. And thus in connection with the revelations that were represented through images besides: namely, if the Prophet was rustic, there were cows and sheep, etc. If, however, he was a soldier, there were generals and armies. If, finally, he was a courtier, a royal throne and the like were represented to him.

5 [15] Finally, the Prophecy varied with respect to the diversity of opinions of the Prophets. Namely, to the Magi (see Mt. 2),<sup>23</sup> who believed in the trifles of astrology, Christ's birth had been revealed through the imaging<sup>24</sup> of a star risen in the east.

6 {33} To the augurs of Nebuchadnezzar (see Ezek. 21:26), the sacking of Jerusalem was revealed in entrails, while the King understood the same thing as well from oracles and from the direction of arrows that he shot upward into the air.

7 To Prophets, furthermore, who believed that human beings act from free choice and their own power, God was revealed as indifferent to and unaware of future human actions.

8 All this we will now demonstrate from Scripture itself, particular by particular.

¶6 [16] First, therefore, it is established from that incident of Elisha (see II Ki. 3:15), who sought an instrument to prophesy to Jehoram and could not perceive God's mind until after he had delighted in the music of the instrument. Then at last he predicted joyous things to Jehoram and friends: this could not have happened beforehand, since he had been angry toward the King. And those who have been angry at someone are capable of imagining evils rather than good things about him.

2 [17] As for what others<sup>25</sup> want to say, however—that God is not revealed to the angry and the sad—they are dreaming. For God revealed that miserable massacre of the firstborn to a Moses angered against Pharaoh, and did so employing an instrument

<sup>21</sup> See 2.2.1.

<sup>22</sup> Reading *dispositione* for *ratione*. Otherwise: pattern.

<sup>23</sup> Mt. 2:1-2.

<sup>24</sup> Lit.: imagination.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* II.36.

(see Ex. 11:8).

3 God was also revealed to the infuriated Cain.<sup>26</sup>

4 The misery and stubbornness of the Jews were revealed to an Ezekiel impatient in the face of anger (see Ezek. 13:14); and a Jeremiah very saddened, and seized by the great tedium of life,<sup>27</sup> prophesied the calamities of the Jews. Thus Josiah did not want to consult him but consulted<sup>o</sup> a female contemporary of his, inasmuch as from her womanly mental cast she was more capable of revealing God's mercy to him (see II Chr. 34).<sup>28</sup> [18] and Micaiah never prophesied anything good to Ahab either, although other true Prophets did (as is obvious from I Ki. 20),<sup>29</sup> but he prophesied evils his whole life (see I Ki. 22:8, and more clearly in II Chr. 18:7).

5 Prophets, accordingly, were more capable of *these* rather than *those* revelations with respect to the varying temperament of the body.

6 [19] The style of the prophecy varied, furthermore, with respect to the eloquence of each Prophet. For the Prophecies of Ezekiel and Amos were not as elegant as those of Isaiah and Nahum, but were written in a cruder style.

7 And if someone who is skilled in the Hebrew language wanted to look into these things more carefully, let him compare with one another some chapters of different Prophets who share the same argument, and he will find great discrepancy in style.

8 Let him compare chapter 1 of the courtly Isaiah, verses 11 to 20, with {34} chapter 5 of the rustic Amos, verses 21 to 24.

9 Let him furthermore compare the order and reasons of Jeremiah's Prophecy that he wrote about Edom in chapter 49, with the order and reasons of Obadiah's.<sup>30</sup>

10 Let him also compare, besides, Isaiah 40:19-20 and 44:8, with Hosea 8:6 and 13:2.

11 And so on concerning the others. If they are all weighed correctly, they easily show that God has no peculiar style of speaking; but he is only elegant, spare, harsh, crude, longwinded, or obscure with respect to the refinement and capacity of the Prophet.

¶7 [20] Even when Prophetic representations and hieroglyphics signified the same thing, they still varied. For to Isaiah, God's glory leaving the Temple was represented otherwise than to Ezekiel. The Rabbis,<sup>31</sup> however, want both representations to have been exactly the same, but that Ezekiel, being a rustic, wondered at it beyond measure<sup>32</sup> and so narrated it in every detail.

2 Still, unless they have had a reliable<sup>33</sup> tradition in this matter, which I hardly believe, they plainly are fantasizing the matter. For Isaiah saw Seraphs with six wings; Ezekiel, in truth, saw<sup>o</sup> beasts with four wings.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Gen. 4:5-15.

<sup>27</sup> Jer. 15:10, 15-18.

<sup>28</sup> I Chr. 34:22-28.

<sup>29</sup> I Ki. 20:13-14, 22, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Jer. 49:7-22, Ob. 1:1-21.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III.6 (on B.T. *Chagigah* 13b).

<sup>32</sup> Lit.: mode.

<sup>33</sup> Lit.: certain.

<sup>34</sup> Is. 6:2, Ezek. 1:6, 8, 11.

3 Isaiah saw God clothed and sitting on a royal throne, whereas Ezekiel saw him as fire.<sup>35</sup> Each without a doubt saw God just as he was used to imagining him.

4 [21] Besides, the representations varied not only to that extent, but also in transparency. For the representations of Zechariah's were too obscure to be able to be understood by him without an explanation, as is established from the narrative of them. Daniel's, however, could not be understood even when explained by the Prophet himself.<sup>36</sup>

5 This did not happen on account of the difficulty of the matter being revealed (for it dealt only with human matters, which do not exceed the limits of human capacity except as they are in the future), but only since Daniel's imagination was not as strong in prophesying while awake as in dreams, as appears from his being so terrified right at the beginning of the revelation that he almost despaired of his strength.

6 Therefore, the matters were represented to him very obscurely on account of a weakness of imagination and lack<sup>o</sup> of strength; and he could not understand them even when they were explained.

7 [22] And here it is to be noted that the words heard by Daniel (as we have shown above)<sup>37</sup> were only imaginary. Therefore, it is no wonder that, being disturbed at that time, {35} he imagined all those words so confusedly and obscurely as to have been able to understand nothing of them afterward.

8 Those who say that God did not want to reveal the matter to Daniel clearly, moreover, do not seem to have read the words of the Angel, who expressly said (see 10:14) *that he came to make Daniel understand what would happen to his populace in the end of days.*

9 Therefore, those matters remained obscure since no one at that time was found who was so skilled in the virtue of the imagination that the matters could be revealed to him more clearly.

10 [23] Finally, the Prophets to whom it was revealed that God would carry Elijah off wanted to persuade Elisha that Elijah had been brought to another place, where he could soon be discovered by them.<sup>38</sup> Surely this clearly shows that they did not understand God's revelation correctly.

11 There is no need to show these things more extensively. For nothing is more clearly established from Scripture than that God gave one Prophet far more grace for prophesying than another.

12 [24] Yet that the Prophecies or representations also varied with respect to the Prophets' opinions that they had embraced, and that Prophets had various, indeed contrary opinions and various prejudices (I am speaking about merely theoretical matters, for those that have to do with probity and good morals are to be thought of<sup>39</sup> quite otherwise), I will show more carefully and at more length. For I deem that this

<sup>35</sup> Is. 6:1, Ezek. 1:13, 27-28.

<sup>36</sup> Zech. 2:1-13, 4:1-6:8, Dan. 7:1-8:27, 9:20-12:12.

<sup>37</sup> See 2.7.4-5.

<sup>38</sup> II Ki. 2:1-18.

<sup>39</sup> Lit.: felt. See Glossary, s.v. "think."

matter is of greater importance. For I will ultimately conclude from it that Prophecy never rendered Prophets more learned, but left them in their preconceived opinions; and on that account, we are hardly bound to believe them concerning merely theoretical matters.

¶8 [25] With an amazing rashness, everyone has persuaded himself that the Prophets knew everything that human understanding can arrive at. And although some passages in Scripture would say to us as clearly as possible that the Prophets were ignorant of some things, they would rather say that they do not understand Scripture in those passages than grant that the Prophets were ignorant of any matter, or else they endeavor to twist the words of Scripture so that it might say what it plainly does not mean.

2 Surely if it is permitted to do either of these, Scripture as a whole is done for. For we will endeavor in vain to show something from Scripture, if it is permitted to posit what is very clear among the obscure and impenetrable things or to interpret them at our discretion.

3 [26] For example, nothing in Scripture is clearer than that Joshua, and perhaps the author who wrote his history<sup>40</sup> as well, deemed that the sun is moved around the earth {36} whereas the earth is at rest, and that the sun stood unmoved for some time.<sup>41</sup>

4 Still, since many do not want to grant that there can exist<sup>42</sup> any change in the heavens, they explain that passage so that it would seem to be saying no such thing. Others, moreover, who have learned to philosophize more correctly—since they understand that the earth is moved and the sun on the contrary is at rest, or is not moved around the earth—endeavor with the utmost strength to twist the same thing out of Scripture, however openly it protests. I surely wonder about them.

5 [27] Are we bound, I ask, to believe that Joshua the soldier was skilled in Astronomy? And that a miracle could not have been revealed to him, or that the sun's light could not have been longer lasting than usual above the horizon, unless Joshua understood its cause? To me, either suggestion surely seems ridiculous. I therefore prefer to say openly that Joshua was ignorant of the true cause of that light, and that he and all the crowd that were there together deemed that the sun was moved around the earth by a daily motion and stood still for a while that day; and they believed it was the cause of that longer lasting light, and did not pay attention to the fact that, from the excessive chill that was in the atmosphere at that time (see Josh. 10:11), a greater refraction than usual could have occurred, or some other such thing that we are not inquiring into now.

6 [28] Thus too, the sign of a retrograde shadow was revealed to Isaiah to suit his grasp, namely, through the retrogression of the sun.<sup>43</sup> For he also deemed that the sun is moved and the earth is at rest.

7 And perhaps he was never thinking of parhelia, even in a dream.

8 We are permitted to state this without any misgiving. For the sign could have

<sup>40</sup> Or: story.

<sup>41</sup> Josh. 10:12-13.

<sup>42</sup> Lit.: be given.

<sup>43</sup> Is. 13:10.

really happened and been predicted to the king by Isaiah, even though the Prophet was ignorant of its true cause.

9 [29] Of the architecture of Solomon, if it indeed was revealed by God, the same is to be said as well. Namely, all its measurements were revealed for the grasp and opinions of Solomon. For since we are not bound to believe that Solomon was a Mathematician, we are permitted to affirm that he was ignorant of the ratio between the circumference and diameter of a circle, and like vulgar workmen deemed that it was 3 to 1.

10 If we are permitted to say that we do not understand the text of I Kings 7:23,<sup>44</sup> I do not know, by Hercules, what we can understand from Scripture, since there the architecture is narrated simply, and merely historically. [30] Indeed, if we are permitted to fantasize that Scripture felt otherwise but for some reason unknown to us {37} meant to write thus, then it would make for nothing else but a complete overturning of the whole of Scripture. For by an equal right anyone could say the same of every passage in Scripture. And so, in keeping with Scripture's authority, we will be permitted both to defend and to perpetrate whatever absurdity or evil can be devised by human malice.

11 Yet what we have stated contains nothing of impiety. For although Solomon, Isaiah, Joshua, etc., were Prophets, they were still human beings, and it is to be figured that nothing human was alien to them.

12 [31] Also, that God would eliminate the human race was revealed to suit the grasp of Noah,<sup>45</sup> since he deemed that the world outside Palestine was not inhabited.

13 In keeping with piety, the Prophets could have been ignorant, and really were ignorant, not only about such matters, but also about others of greater importance. For they taught nothing specific about the divine attributes, but had quite vulgar opinions about God. Their revelations were also accommodated to these as well—as I will now show by many attestations of Scripture, so that you may easily see that they are to be praised and diligently commended not so much for grandeur and preëminence of intellect, as for piety and a steadfastness of spirit.

¶9 [32] Adam, the first to whom God was revealed, was ignorant of God's being all-present and all-knowing. For he hid himself from God and endeavored to excuse his sin before God, as he would have before a human being.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, God was also revealed to him to suit his grasp: namely, as one who was not everywhere and was unaware of Adam's place and sin. For he heard, or seemed to hear, God walking through the garden and calling him and asking where he was. Furthermore, God was asking him on the occasion of his shame whether he had eaten of the prohibited tree.

2 Adam, accordingly, recognized no attribute of God other than that God was the maker of all things.

3 [33] To Cain, God was revealed to suit his grasp as well, namely, as unaware of

<sup>44</sup> The biblical verse reads: *And he [Solomon] made the molten sea ten cubits from the one brim to the other; rounded all about, and it was five cubits in height: and a line of thirty cubits encompassed it round about* [underlining added]. The underlined dimensions are the basis for Spinoza's claim in 2.8.9.

<sup>45</sup> Gen. 6:11-13.

<sup>46</sup> Gen. 3:8-13.

human matters;<sup>47</sup> and there was no need for him to have a grander knowledge of God, for him to repent of his sin.<sup>48</sup>

4 To Laban, God revealed himself as the God of Abraham, since Laban believed that each nation had its own peculiar God.

5 See Genesis 31:29.

6 [34] Abraham, too, was ignorant of the fact that God is everywhere and knows all matters beforehand. For when he heard the sentence<sup>49</sup> against the Sodomites, he prayed that {38} God not execute it before he knew whether all were worthy of that punishment. For he says (see Gen. 18:24), **אָלַי יִשְׁחַמֵּשׁ כָּדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר** *Perhaps fifty just men will be found in that city.* Nor was God revealed to him otherwise. For thus he speaks in Abraham's imagination: **אֲדֹהֶ נָא וְאֲרָא הַכְּזַעַקְתָּה** **הַבָּאָה אֲלִי עָשָׂו כָּלָה וְאֵם לֹא אָדַעַת** *Now I will descend to see whether they have done in line with the great complaint that has come to me; and if not, I will know (the matter).*<sup>50</sup>

7 For the divine attestation about Abraham (about which, see Gen. 18:19) contains nothing besides obedience alone, and that he admonished his household to do<sup>o</sup> the equitable and the good, and not that he had grand thoughts about God.

8 [35] Moses, too, did not sufficiently perceive that God is all-knowing and that all human actions are directed solely by decree. For although God had said to him (see Ex. 3:18) that the Israelites would comply with him, he still called the matter into doubt and replied (see Ex. 4:1), **וְהַנּוּ לֹא יַאמְינוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ לְקֹוִלִי** *What if they do not believe me and will not comply with me?*

9 And therefore God had been revealed to him, too, as indifferent to and unaware of future human actions.

10 For he gave him two signs and said (Ex. 4:8), *If it happens that they do not believe the first sign, they will still believe the last. For if they do not believe the last either, (then) take a bit of the water of the river, etc.*

11 [36] And surely if anyone wanted to weigh Moses' tenets without prejudice, he will clearly discover that his opinion of God was that he is a being that has always existed, exists, and will always exist. And because of this, he called him by the name **יְהֹוָה Jehovah**, which in Hebrew expresses these three tenses. About his nature, however, he taught nothing more than that he is compassionate, gentle, etc., and highly jealous, as is established from many passages in the Pentateuch.<sup>51</sup>

12 Furthermore, he believed and taught that this being so differed from all other beings that he could not be expressed in any image of any thing, or even be seen, not so much on account of a conflict with the thing as on account of human weakness—and besides, by reason of power, that he was special, or unique. [37] He did grant that there were beings who (without doubt, by the order and command of God) played the role of God, that is, beings to whom God gave the authority, right, and power to direct

<sup>47</sup> Gen. 4:9.

<sup>48</sup> Gen. 4:13-16.

<sup>49</sup> See Glossary, s.v. "tenet."

<sup>50</sup> Gen. 18:21.

<sup>51</sup> E.g., Ex. 20:5, 34:14, Dt. 4:24. Cf. 7.3.5-12.

nations and provide for and take care of them. Yet he taught that this being, which {39} they were bound to worship, was the highest and supreme God, or (if I may use the phrase of the Hebrews) the God of Gods;<sup>52</sup> and therefore he said in the song of Exodus (15:11), *מי כמוכה באלים יהוה Who among the Gods is similar to you, Jehovah?* And Jethro said (18:11), *עטת ידעת כי גדוֹל יהוה מכל האלים Now I know that Jehovah is greater than all the Gods;* that is, ultimately I am compelled to grant Moses that Jehovah is greater than all the Gods, and special in power. Whether Moses in truth believed that these beings that played the role of God were created by God, can be doubted, since about their creation and principle, he said nothing that we know of. [38] He taught, besides, that this being brought this visible world into order out of Chaos (see Gen. 1:2) and gave seeds to nature, and so had the highest right and highest power to do everything; and on the basis of this highest right and power of his, he chose the Hebrew nation and a certain area of land for himself alone (see Dt. 10:14-15) and left the other nations and regions in the care of the other Gods substituted by him (see Dt. 4:19 and 32:8-9). And therefore he was called the God of Israel and the God of Jerusalem, and the other Gods were called the Gods of the other nations (see II Chr. 32:19).

13 [39] And because of this as well, the Jews believed that the region God chose for them required a special worship of God, completely different from the worship of other regions—indeed, that the worship of other Gods proper to the other regions could not be allowed. For those peoples whom the King of Assyria led into the lands of the Jews were believed to be torn by lions since they were ignorant of the worship of the Gods of those lands (see II Ki. 17:25-26, etc.).

14 [40] And Jacob, in the opinion of Ibn Ezra,<sup>53</sup> said to his sons on that account, when they wanted to head for the fatherland, that they were to prepare themselves for a new worship and put aside alien Gods—that is, the worship of the Gods of the land where they then were (see Gen. 35:2-3).

15 David, too, so as to say to Saul that he was compelled on account of his persecution to live outside the fatherland, said that he was being expelled from the heritage of God and sent to worship other Gods (see I Sam. 1 26:19).

16 [41] Finally, Moses believed that this being, or God, had his home in the heavens (see Dt. 33:27). This opinion was very frequent among the Heathens.

17 If we now pay attention to Moses' revelations, we will find that they {40} were accommodated to these opinions. For since he believed that God's nature suffered those conditions we have said, namely, compassion, gentleness, etc., therefore God was revealed to him as befit this opinion of his and under these attributes (see Ex. 34:6-7, where it is narrated in what format<sup>54</sup> God appeared to Moses, and vss. 4-5 of the Decalogue).<sup>55</sup>

18 [42] Furthermore, in Exodus 33:18 it is narrated that Moses sought from God to

<sup>52</sup> Dt. 10:17, Josh. 22:22.

<sup>53</sup> See Ibn Ezra on Gen. 35:3, Dt. 31:5, 16.

<sup>54</sup> See Glossary, s.v. "reason."

<sup>55</sup> Ex. 20:4-5 or Dt. 5:9-10.

be permitted to see him. But since Moses, as has already been said,<sup>56</sup> had formed no image of God in the brain, and God is not revealed to the Prophets except with respect to the disposition of their imagination (as I have already shown),<sup>57</sup> therefore God did not appear to him in any image. And this happened, I say, since it conflicted with Moses' imagination. For other Prophets attest to having seen God, namely, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, et al.

19 [43] And because of this, God answered Moses, **לֹא תּוּכַל לְרֹאֹת אֶת פָנֵי** *You will not be able to see my face*,<sup>58</sup> and since Moses believed that God was visible—that is, that it did not imply any contradiction on the part of the divine nature, for otherwise he would not have asked for any such thing—therefore he adds, **כִּי لَا יְرֹאֵנִי הָאָדָם** *since no one will see me and live*.<sup>59</sup> God therefore renders a reason compatible with the opinion of Moses. For he does not say that it implies a contradiction on the part of the divine nature—as the matter really is—but that it cannot happen on account of human weakness.

20 [44] Besides, so that God might reveal to Moses that, since the Israelites had prayed to the calf,<sup>60</sup> they became like the rest of the nations, he says in Exodus 33:2-3 that he would send an angel, that is, a being that would take care of the Israelites in the role of the highest being, and that he did not want to be among them. For in this mode he left Moses nothing by which it would be established for him that the Israelites were more favored by God than the other nations, whom God had also handed over into the care of other beings, or angels, as is established from verse 16 of the same chapter.

21 [45] Finally, since God was believed to inhabit the heavens, therefore God was revealed as descending from heaven above a mountain;<sup>61</sup> and also Moses ascended the mountain to speak to God,<sup>62</sup> which there would hardly be a need for him to do if he could just as easily imagine God everywhere.

22 The Israelites recognized almost nothing about God even though he was revealed to them: this they showed more than sufficiently when, a few days later, they handed over the honor and worship of him to a calf and believed it to be the Gods who had led them out of Egypt.<sup>63</sup>

23 [46] And surely it is not to be believed that human beings accustomed to the {41} superstitions of the Egyptians, crude, and done in by a most miserable slavery, understood anything sound about God, or that Moses taught them anything but a mode of living—not as a Philosopher, that they might ultimately be compelled to live well on the basis of the freedom of the spirit, but as a Lawgiver, on the basis of the imperium of the Law.

<sup>56</sup> See 2.9.11-12.

<sup>57</sup> See 2.2.1, 2.5.4, 2.5.8-7.12.

<sup>58</sup> Ex. 33:20a.

<sup>59</sup> Ex. 33:20b.

<sup>60</sup> Ex. 32:1-4.

<sup>61</sup> Ex. 19:20.

<sup>62</sup> Ex. 19:3, 24:9, 12-18, 34:2-4, Dt. 34:1.

<sup>63</sup> Ex. 32:4, 8.

24 [47] Therefore, the plan for living well—or true life and the worship and love of God—was for them more slavery than true freedom and the grace and gift of God. For he bade them to love God and keep his law that they might bear past goods received from God (freedom from Egyptian servitude, etc.), and terrified them with threats besides if they were to be transgressors of those precepts; and if, on the other hand, they were to observe them, he promised many good things.<sup>64</sup>

25 Accordingly, he taught them in the same mode in which parents are used to teaching children who lack all reason.

26 Therefore, it is certain that they were ignorant of the excellence of virtue and true blessedness.

27 [48] Jonah deemed that he would be fleeing the sight of God.<sup>65</sup> This seems to show that he, too, believed that God handed over the care of the other regions outside Judea to other powers, which yet were set up by him.

28 And there is no one in the Old Testament who has spoken of God more reasonably than Solomon, who surpassed everyone of his age in the natural light. And therefore he figured he was above the Law as well (for it was only handed down to those who lacked reason and the lessons of natural understanding); and he gave little weight to all the laws that have to do with the king and which consisted mainly of three (see Dt. 17:16-17). Indeed, he plainly violated them (in which he erred, however, and did what is not worthy of a Philosopher;<sup>66</sup> namely, he indulged in pleasures). He taught that all goods of fortune are vain for mortals (see Eccles.),<sup>67</sup> that human beings have nothing more outstanding than understanding, and that they are punished by no greater comeuppance than foolishness (see Prov. 16:22).

29 [49] But let us return to the Prophets, whose discrepant opinions we have undertaken to note as well.

30 The Rabbis who left us those books of the Prophets (which are the only ones extant now) discovered Ezekiel's tenets conflicting with the tenets of Moses (as is narrated in *Tractate Shabbat*, chapter 1, folio 13, page 2),<sup>68</sup> so that they almost resolved not to admit his book among the canonical ones, and plainly would have hidden it if one Hananiah had not undertaken by himself to explicate it, which they said he ultimately did with great labor and study (as is narrated there). For what {42} reason, however, it is not sufficiently established: namely, whether it was that he would write a commentary that has perhaps perished, or that he would change Ezekiel's own words and speeches (audacity as it was) and embellish them on the basis of his own mental cast. Whatever it may be, chapter 18, at least, does not seem to agree with Exodus 34:7, nor with Jeremiah 32:18, etc.

31 [50] Samuel believed that when God decreed something, he never repented of the decree (see I Sam. 15:29); for he said to Saul, who was repenting of his sin and

<sup>64</sup> E.g., Dt. 6:4-25, with Lev. 26:3-45, Dt. 8:1-20, 27:9-30:20.

<sup>65</sup> Jon. 1:3.

<sup>66</sup> Or: what a Philosopher is not entitled to.

<sup>67</sup> Eccles. 1:2-3 and *passim*.

<sup>68</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 13b. (trans. I. Epstein et al., *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo'ed I* [London: Soncino Press, 1938], 55). See also 10.2.57, 59.

wanted to pray to God and seek forgiveness for it, that God would not change his decree against him. To Jeremiah, however, the contrary had been revealed (see 18:8, 10): namely, that whether God decreed some harm or some good to a nation, he repented of his decree, provided that human beings changed either for the better or for the worse from the time of the sentence.<sup>69</sup>

32 Yet Joel only taught that God repented of doing<sup>o</sup> harm (see his 2:13).

33 [51] Finally, from Genesis 4:7 it is very clearly established that human beings can master the temptations of sin and act well. For it is said to Cain, who still never mastered them, as is established from Scripture itself and from Josephus.<sup>70</sup> The same is also gathered very evidently from the chapter of Jeremiah just brought up.<sup>71</sup> For he says that God repents of a decree of his which is brought forth for the harm or good of human beings, insofar as human beings want to change their mores and mode of living. Yet Paul, on the contrary, teaches nothing more openly than that human beings have no imperium over the temptations of the flesh, except by God's special calling and grace.

34 See Romans 9:10, etc., and the fact that at 3:5 and 6:19, where he attributes justice to God, he corrects himself for speaking thus in a human manner and on account of the weakness of the flesh.

¶10 [52] From these things, accordingly, what we were proposing to show is more than sufficiently established: namely, that God accommodated revelations to the grasp and opinions of the Prophets; and that the Prophets could have been, and really were, ignorant of matters that have to do with theory alone and not with charity and the conduct<sup>72</sup> of life; and that they had contrary opinions.

2 Therefore, it is farfetched for knowledge of natural and spiritual matters to be sought from them.

3 [53] We accordingly conclude that we are not bound to believe the Prophets in anything else besides what is the aim and substance of the revelation. In the rest, each is free to believe as he wants. For example, the revelation to Cain<sup>73</sup> only teaches us that God admonished Cain to {43} true life. For that is the only intent and substance of the revelation, not, in truth, to teach freedom of the will or Philosophical matters. Therefore, even if freedom of the will is very clearly contained in the words and reasons of that admonition, we are permitted to think the contrary, since those words and reasons were only accommodated to suit the grasp of Cain.

4 [54] Thus, too, Micaiah's revelation<sup>74</sup> only means to teach that God revealed to Micaiah the true outcome of the battle of Ahab against Aram; and therefore we are only bound to believe this as well. Whatever is contained in that revelation besides this, therefore, hardly touches us: namely, about God's true and false Spirit, and about the

<sup>69</sup> See note to 2.9.6.

<sup>70</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* I.55, 56, 58.

<sup>71</sup> See 2.9.30.

<sup>72</sup> Or: use.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. 2.9.33.

<sup>74</sup> 1 Ki. 22:17, 19-22.

army<sup>75</sup> of heaven standing on either side of God, and the rest of the details of that revelation. And so, let each believe about them as seems compatible with his reason.

5 [55] The same is also to be said about the reasons by which God showed Job his power over all things<sup>76</sup>—if indeed it is true that they were revealed to Job and that the author was eager to narrate a history<sup>77</sup> and not (as some believe) to embellish his own concepts: namely, that they were brought in to suit the grasp of Job and only to convince him, not, in truth, that they were universal reasons to convince everyone.

6 [56] Nor is it to be stated otherwise about Christ's reasons by which he convinces<sup>78</sup> the Pharisees of their stubbornness and ignorance, and exhorts the disciples to true life: namely, he accommodated his reasons to the opinions and principles of each one.

7 For example, when he said to the Pharisees (see Mt. 12:26), *And if Satan throws Satan out, he is divided against himself; how, therefore, would his kingdom stand*, he meant nothing except to convince the Pharisees on the basis of their own principles, and not to teach that there are<sup>79</sup> Demons or some kingdom of Demons. Thus, too, when he said to the disciples (Mt. 18:10), *See to it not to despise one of these little ones; for I say to you that their Angels in heaven, etc.*

8 He means to teach nothing else but that they not be proud or despise anyone; and he does not, in truth, mean to teach the rest of what is contained in his reasons: these he brings in to persuade the disciples better of the matter.

9 [57] Finally, the same is absolutely to be said about the reasons and signs of the Apostles; and there is no need to speak of these more extensively. For if all the Passages of Scripture were to be enumerated to me which were only written *ad hominem* or to suit someone's grasp and are not defended as divine teachings without great prejudice to Philosophy,<sup>80</sup> {44} I would depart far from the brevity for which I long. Let it suffice, therefore, to have touched on some few and universal things; let the more curious<sup>81</sup> reader weigh the rest on his own.<sup>82</sup>

10 [58] Be that as it may, although these things that we have dealt with so far concerning Prophets and Prophecy pertain chiefly to the goal I am aiming at, namely, separating Philosophy from Theology, still, since I have touched on this question in universal terms,<sup>83</sup> it may be inquired in addition whether the Prophetic gift was only peculiar to the Hebrews or, in truth, common to all nations. Then, too, there is what is to be stated about the calling of the Hebrews. About these things, see the following Chapter.

<sup>75</sup> See note on **צבאות** at 1.20.18.

76 Job 38ff

<sup>77</sup> Or: story

<sup>78</sup> Or convicts. Likewise in 3.10.7.

<sup>79</sup> Lit. are given.

<sup>80</sup> Or perhaps; without the great prejudice of Philosophy.

<sup>81</sup> Or careful. Cf. 2.7.18.

<sup>88</sup> More accurately within himself. Cf. 2.7.12.

— More or less lit.